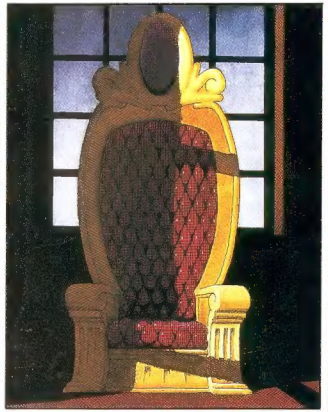
ISSN 0712-7714

CEREBUS
mothers & daughters
29

$2.25 U.S. $2.75 CAN. £1.25 U.K.

INSIGHTS



179
FEB

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

I've been thinking that I might have to reprint these columns some time in the future (replacing the black indicia box with pithy little mantras like 'Draw a page a day' and 'don't fall in love'). At every signing and convention, I continue to get asked questions about topics I've already covered. It would be nice to be able to hand someone a little booklet instead. Anyway. Onward.

★★★★★★★★★★

You have to strike a balance between being the biggest fan of your work and being your severest critic. I remember interviewing Berni Wrightson back in 1974 or so and him telling me that he likes to sit and look at his own work when he's finished a page that he's especially happy with. Up to that point, I was of the 'severest critic' school. I would occasionally do a piece I was happy with, but I tended to focus on those things I was dissatisfied with. Being mostly a critic of your own work leads to frustration and a sense of futility (I can't draw, so why bother). It also compels you to redo work that you've already finished and, as I've mentioned previously, there is really no time for that in the comic book field. At the same time, I have known many, many cartoonists who have had the opposite problem. They were the biggest and most uncritical fans of their own work that you could imagine. Most of these fellows (virtually all of them, in fact) were *aspiring* cartoonists. They achieved a certain level of mediocre proficiency and are (to this day) sitting in their studios waiting for the rest of the world to share their assessment. It's a real problem. On the one hand, being too critical of your work means that you get frustrated and give up, while being too big an admirer of your work limits your ability to improve. At essence, this is why so few amateur cartoonists become professional cartoonists: and why most professional cartoonists are of the 'skyrocket' variety. They appear out of nowhere, do a series of jobs that get better and better, reach a peak, flare briefly and then lapse into an endless regurgitation of a few stylistic tricks that verges on self-parody. Or, they vanish altogether from the scene into commercial art or animation.

The solution for me was to treat *Cerebus* as a process. Given that I was going to be very or somewhat dissatisfied with every page that I produced after it was done, I decided to treat each page as a learning process, accepting the fact that my progress would be of the 'four steps forward, three steps back' variety. Gerhard always remarks on the fact that he is unhappy with every page that he does. It is only in retrospect that he can see merit in a percentage of his work (once the current reprint volume comes in, we both sit, reading our copies and going 'Look at that — that's brilliant. Why can't I draw like that, *now?*'). Over time, you will improve. Put another way, you can labour over each and every page when you are starting out. You can re-do the page a hundred times, but the odds are (unless you're Dave Stevens) you are going to hate what you did earlier after you improve (come to think of it, Dave Stevens probably feels the same way).

You also have to realize that this is a story-telling medium. It is, in Larry Marder's words, habitual entertainment. Your readers want to know what happens next. Pure and simple. I could have taken four days per page drawing *High Society* when I first put Astoria in the book and maybe some of those faces and hairstyles wouldn't have been so butt-ugly. It is only in the last two years, since the beginning of *Mothers & Daughters* that I have managed to put her on paper the way I want her to look. There are still angles that I draw her from that I am not happy with; but, over the course of ten years, I have been whittling away at the problem and I am closer to a solution now than I was then. But (and this is a big but) Astoria has consistently been one of the most popular *Cerebus* characters since her first appearance. Jeff Smith (I discovered after doing two Silver Snail signings with him) doesn't do sketches of Thorn for a lot the same reason I don't do sketches of Astoria or Lord Julius; drawing them is hard work and they are not characters I can whip out as fast or easily as Cerebus. Jeff can do the Bones with his eyes closed, but Thorn is just not in that category. Thorn, Lord Julius and Astoria are also characters that look quite different from panel to panel. But, the fact remains that if I delayed the next issue of *Cerebus* trying to draw them 'right' or if Jeff wrote Thorn out of the story-line because he wasn't happy with every detail on every Thorn face he drew, there would be a backlash, in both cases, of monumental proportions.

Give your readers the next instalment of this story you have addicted them to. Do the best you can on it at the time you're producing it. Take it as an article of faith that you will improve. Then, some day, you too can be looking at a copy of your comic book from five years ago, and you, too, will be able to say like professional cartoonists the world over:

'Jeez. This looks like shit.'

CEREBUS

NO. 179 FEBRUARY 1994

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

•

BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

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BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

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BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY **PRENEY PRINT & LITHO INC.**, WINDSOR, ONTARIO.

Ascension
Vertigo Horse
120,000 copies
10% of cover price
① Adult suspense
* Astoria is 'hot'
- Palmu reads
- audience is action oriented
- sophisticated
Royalties paragraph 24
12% 25,000
15% 95,000 cb
multiply times
② Rituals
- Secret Society
- threatens Astoria
- Astoria tied up
25
7.5
300,000
95
x15
475
95
1,425,000 cb
12.5
107
1,425,000
Sales
1. Nursery Cannibal
72,000
1st print
28,000
collected
1,425,000
300,000
1,725,000 cb
10%
172,000 cb
100 crowns
1,720 crowns
lead paragraph
"you're an outlaw yourself — who do you think will save you?"
2. I Cut out your Ovaries
58,000
30,000
part two
Adult suspense action oriented
3. Ovaries
29,000
12,000
part three
too much dialogue
Secret Society leader rapes Astoria
Reason
wants a
- advance 2,000 crowns
- royalties 1,720
Ascension Part One
cheque for 280 crowns
30 days
Secret Society based on sadism without reason terrorize women outside matriarchy
Kevlliots prostitutes.

Astoria pulled with all her might at the bright yellow cloth restraints which bound her wrists and ankles. The leering figure before her was handsome in a cold and heartless manner; he was unshaven, his thick brown hair arranged carelessly across his forehead.

'Pleasure and pain,' he said simply, tracing the fingers of his left *hand along her inner thighs. In his other hand, he held a long knife with a weighted, jewelled handle. She attempted to wrench herself away from his loathsome touch, but not even the slightest movement was possible. She snarled obscenities into the gag which covered her mouth; the rough cloth reduced the words to incoherent and strangled noises of ineffective outrage.*

The fingers rose higher and still higher, finding the very center of her physical being, seeking, there, the small hard knot of nerve endings. The index finger found it and began pressing gently upon it, insistently enough so that the rhythmic pulsing within was evident to them both. Her assailant grinned wickedly, and the finger began to move in slow, circular . . .

'Mr. Reid?'

'Yes, Miss Van Stone?'

'Milieu is here. Shall I send her up?'

Victor sighed. He was not looking forward to this.

'Yes, Miss Van Stone. Send her up.'

Milieu was clearly outraged on Victor's behalf. The thin worry line on her forehead (which was usually all but invisible) seemed chiselled by some otherworldly sculptor with more passion than talent. Her brown eyes smouldered, merging with the severity of her eyebrows, which made Victor grateful (not for the first time) that she was his friend and not his employer.

'And what did *you* say?' she demanded.

'I said I would do what I can,' replied Victor, who felt no rage himself; who, in point of fact, felt nothing. He was seated at his desk, with an opened copy of ***In Palnu's Shadow*** and the sample chapter of ***Forever Palnu*** before him, as well as a notepad on which he was jotting random paragraphs and dialogue for *Ascension*. It was as if he had enrolled himself in a commercial writing course, Victor 'Palnu' Reid 101, and was eagerly 'cramming' for his final examination.

'I'm sorry?' said Victor, still lost in the dungeon beneath Willesden Square with Astoria and her as yet unnamed and motiveless captor.

'I said, what about Lillian and Elsie?' snapped Milieu, 'What about Cerebus ascending, for God's sake?'

'I have to . . .' (how had Carl Berger put it?) '. . . capitalize on the success of the Palnu Trilogy while it's still fresh in everyone's mind,' explained Victor. 'I have to keep my irons in the fire.'

Actually, what Carl Berger had said was that Victor had to 'strike while the iron was hot,' and he had further attempted to dissuade Victor from accepting any outside assignments lest he find himself with 'too many irons in the fire.' Victor, of course, was new to the rarefied atmosphere of best-selling-reads jargon and could be forgiven the odd misquote or two. He was, as promised, doing what he could.

'Palnu Trilogy?' asked Milieu, and then reiterated incredulously, 'Palnu *TRILOGY?!* Since when did that — and I quote — 'pile of smut-laden, mouth-breathing mindlessness' get elevated to the status of a *trilogy?*'

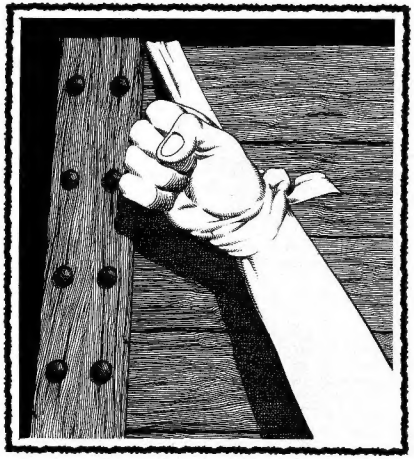
Victor, without raising his head, shrugged in a manner which was both helpless and eloquent.

'So, if Lillian and Elsie and Cerebus ascending aren't in *Ascension*, then what *is*, for God's sake?'

Victor toyed with the idea of showing Milieu the recently completed paragraph. He then considered saying that there was very little in *Ascension* — the *new Ascension* — which could be construed as benefitting any deity, or any individual apart from Mr. Chartwell at the bank or perhaps Victor's accountant and creditors. Instead he held up the sample *Forever Palnu* chapter.

The sound of exasperation which issued forth in a cloud of cigarette smoke left no doubt as to Milieu's reaction. Victor still couldn't bring himself to look at her.

'I'll get back to it,' he said. 'I just misunderstood what Vertigo Horse was looking for. If I do it right, *Ascension* can be very profitable. The way I see it . . .' (what was it Carl Berger had said?) '. . . if I can write something that appeals to Vertigo Horse's target customer, I can reach a much wider audience. I can make the same points about Cirinism and Kevillism, but if I give the readers what they want as well, I can have a much greater impact. Also, because I don't



have to worry about subtext, subtleties and an overarching theme, I'll be able to write faster. I could finish *Ascension* in two years, maybe less. Once I'm financially secure, I can write exactly what I want to write about without having to worry if it sells or not. People aren't . . .' (how had Carl Berger put it?) '. . . people aren't interested in what happened a hundred years ago. Yesterday's potatoes are yesterday's news.' (Victor was unsure if that was the correct phrase, or if he had inverted it.) 'The readers want something modern: something that applies to their own lives and their own interests. Astoria. Cirin. Violence. They want . . . '

Victor had, unfortunately, exhausted the thematic complexities which would constitute the new, more modern *Ascension*. Astoria. Cirin. Violence. It was the essence of the Vertigo Horse line. It was couched in exalted terminology: 'sophisticated adult suspense', 'challenging content', 'action-oriented', 'fast-paced storytelling,' but these were largely euphemisms for 'literate pornography' and 'mindless violence'. It was the essence of his Palnu Trilogy (Milieu was right, of course; even the sobriquet 'trilogy' amounted to a pretentious rationalisation). And now it would be the essence of *Ascension* as well. He could picture the advertising copy on the back cover of each instalment: 'Astoria! Cirin! Violence!'

Victor stared glumly at the large manilla envelope on the floor which contained the rag-tag quilt of *Ascension's* brief second incarnation: Milieu's research and some of his best prose grafted onto a short story he had never cared for. It also contained the amputated, truncated fragments and snippets of Milieu's white notebook. He was afraid that at any moment she would ask for it back. He was afraid to show her all that remained of their hours, days of hard work: paper fragments, pages scored with rectangular windows where Victor had committed his desperate acts of literary surgery.

The silence, Victor realised, had stretched between them as this reverie had seized hold. He couldn't remember what he had been saying. He had four days to come up with a finished instalment. He should have been at the Vertigo Horse offices by now. The sands in his mental hourglass were slipping away. He needed to resolve their discussion (argument?), and quickly.

'When I'm done,' Victor said quietly, 'when I'm finished *Ascension*, I promise you we'll go right back to work on . . . on . . .'

He realised that he didn't know what to call it. It wasn't *Ascension* — not anymore. It was not only mutilated, it was not only homeless (having been denied residence at Vertigo Horse), it was also nameless. They would just have to re-name it, Victor decided. Some day he would tell Milieu the whole story and they would work on it together, assembling the various jigsaw pieces over a week or two, and, once it was back to its original form, they could just pick up where they had left off. As soon as *Ascension* was finished.

He picked up the notebook in which the new *Ascension* was taking shape and was reminded of the time that was passing.

'I'm afraid I won't be able to get you to proofread this one,' Victor said.

Milieu ventured no reply and, after several seconds, he continued.

'Since there's so little time before the printing deadline, Mrs. Potts — Karen — wants me to do most of the writing in the office, so she and Mr. Berger — Carl — can . . . make suggestions, smooth out any rough edges before it's typeset. They have proofreaders on staff who will be working . . . working for me.'

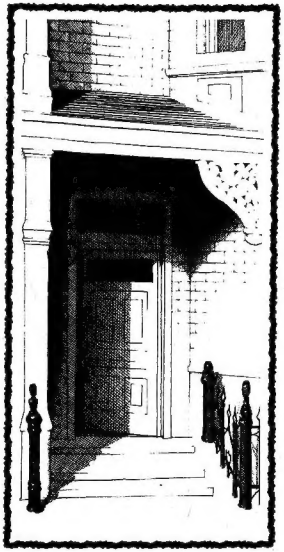
This was a gross distortion of the truth, Victor knew. His ego had been scraped raw in Berger's office and needed some manner of balm, even if it meant lying to Milieu.

'Oh, don't worry, we'll assign you to a proofreader,' Carl Berger had said. Victor would be assigned *to* a proofreader, as he had been assigned *to* an editor, as that editor had assigned him *to* her assistant. Victor wondered, grimly, how long it would be before he was assigned *to* the receptionist: emptying her wastebasket, running errands.

'I pushed for them to use you,' Victor said, looking up at her for the first time, his lie lending him the needed strength. 'I told them what a great help you've been to me these last few weeks. I told them how much I valued your opinion and that I thought you'd be a great asset to the project.'

Of course, Victor had said none of this. He had meekly nodded his acquiescence at every turn, smiling enthusiastically. He waited for his words to create the desired effect. Milieu's expression was unchanged and Victor felt himself bristling inwardly. Of course what he had just said was a complete fabrication, but in its context, it raised Milieu to the level of a (what was the term Carl Berger had used?) key player. It put her very nearly on an equal footing with the likes of Mrs. Potts — Karen — and Mr. Berger — Carl. And there she sat, completely expressionless, as if his gallant championing of her professional cause were . . . meaningless.

'We will work on . . . this other thing. I promise you that,' said Victor, smiling,



granting her the concession from his lofty perch in the Vertigo Horse hierarchy. 'As soon as *Ascension* is completed.'

'Sure, Victor,' she said, grinding out a freshly lit cigarette. She stood then, and Victor noticed that she hadn't removed her coat, that her purse still hung suspended from one shoulder.

'I can see you have a lot of work to do,' she added. 'Don't get up; I can let myself out.'

Victor stood, in spite of himself. His internal hourglass forgotten for the moment, he was aware, only, that Milieu was leaving. He did have a lot of work to do. Their discussion (argument?) had ended. He would be at the Vertigo Horse offices within the hour. Still, he cast about for something, anything that he could say or do. Milieu was leaving.

'I could have Carl send you copies of *Ascension* as it comes out, if you like,' he said hurriedly.

He knew this was doubtful, if not impossible. Perhaps, he thought, he could find a stray Vertigo Horse envelope around the offices, or offer to buy some. There was really no way for Milieu to know that it was Victor who was sending them to her and not Carl Berger. He could get his housekeeper to address the envelope (Milieu would recognize his handwriting). He could mail the copies from somewhere in the Lower City near the Vertigo Horse offices, so that the postmark would . . .

'No,' she said, her back to him, framed by the doorway, her waist-length hair the only feature visible to him. 'No, I don't think so,' she added, and then, after a short pause, 'Thank you, anyway.'

She turned, perceptibly, to her right, though not quite far enough for Victor to see her face.

'Take care of yourself, Victor,' she said. And then she was gone.

Victor listened as she descended the short, narrow stairway. The sound of her footsteps vanished as she crossed the living-room carpet only to re-emerge briefly as she crossed the parquet flooring of the entryway. The sounds of traffic and voices were audible for a moment and then they were gone; they were all that signalled to Victor the opening and closing of the front door.

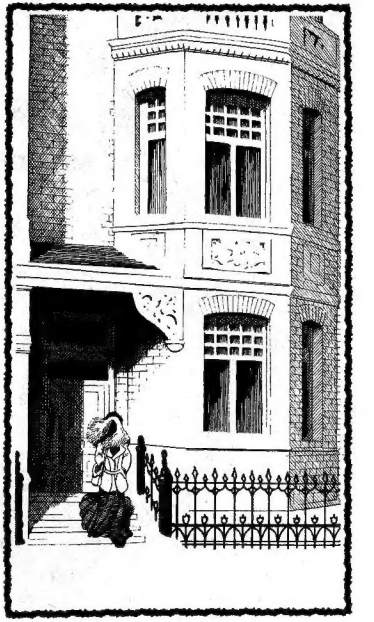
For several minutes, Victor listened to the silence, not really knowing what (if anything) he hoped or expected to hear. At last, he slowly sank into his chair, time and the Vertigo Horse offices briefly forgotten. His eyes settled on the small engraving of M. Zulli's *Ascension* cover propped up on one corner of his desk: Lady Howe (or was it Beth?) frozen in the act of wrenching open her robe. Beth (or was it Astoria?) uttering her single, wordless cry (of anger? pain? triumph?); it was a wordless cry which would echo and re-echo, multiplied a hundred thousandfold from racks and shelves and bins in reads stores across the length and breadth of Estarcion in a few weeks' time.

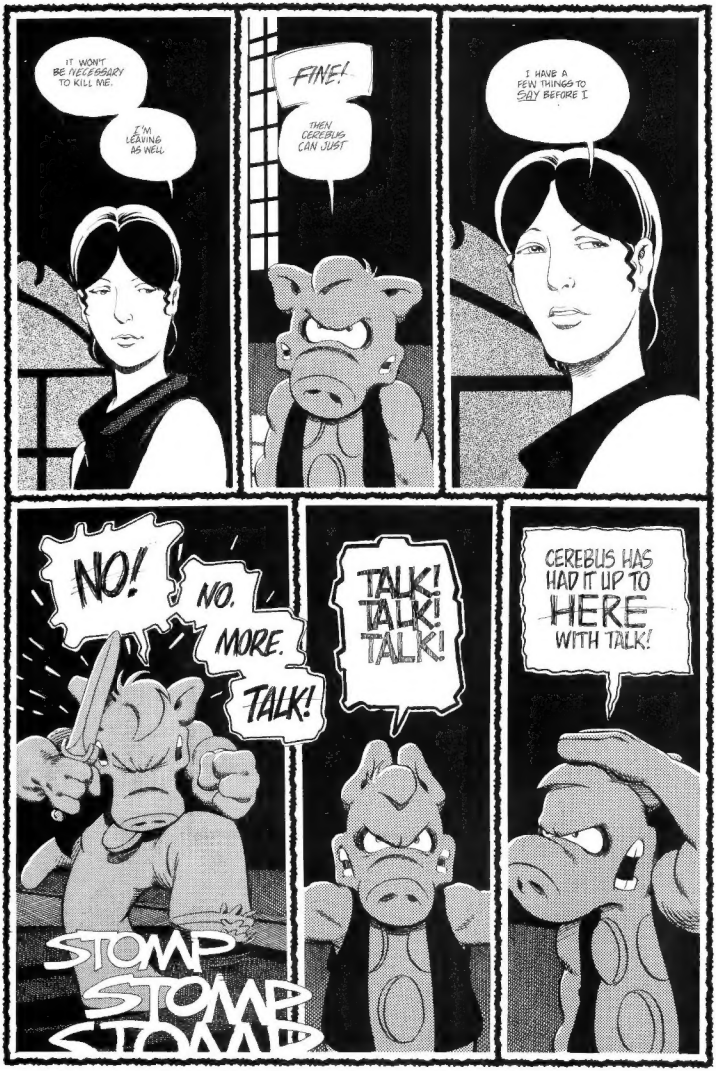
Of course, Astoria had short hair.

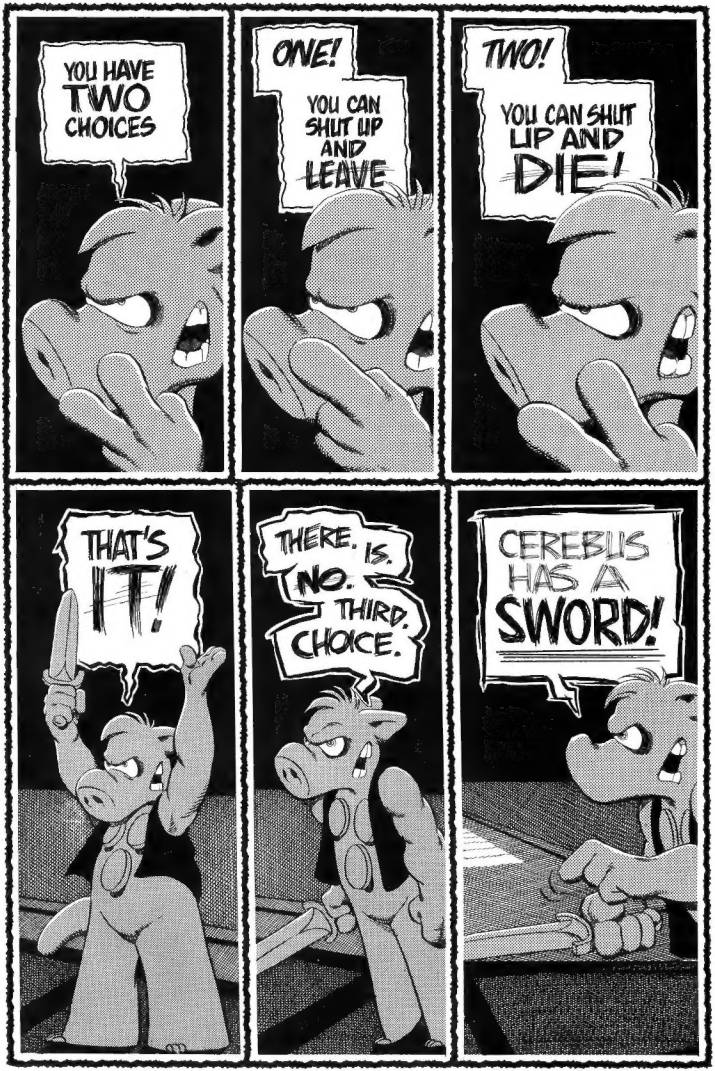
Everyone knew that.

Victor briefly considered contriving some plot device, some ***deus ex machina*** that would compel Astoria to don a long, curly, dark wig, tying the cover illustration and his text together. He decided, after a few moments of introspection, that it just didn't matter, really.

It just wasn't important.




IT WON'T BE NECESSARY TO KILL ME.
I'M LEAVING AS WELL.
FINE!
THEN CEREBUS CAN JUST
I HAVE A FEW THINGS TO SAY BEFORE I
NO!
NO.
MORE.
TALK!
TALK!
TALK!
TALK!
CEREBUS HAS HAD IT UP TO HERE WITH TALK!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP


YOU HAVE TWO CHOICES
ONE! YOU CAN SHUT UP AND LEAVE
TWO! YOU CAN SHUT UP AND DIE!
THAT'S IT!
THERE. IS. NO. THIRD. CHOICE.
CEREBUS HAS A SWORD!

CEREBUS HAS YOU AT HIS MERCY
YOU'RE AN HERMAPHRODITE
AN HERMAPHRODITE
YOU HAVE BOTH MALE AND FEMALE GENITALIA
EVEN MORE INTERESTING-- YOU HAVE BOTH MALE AND FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE ORGANS

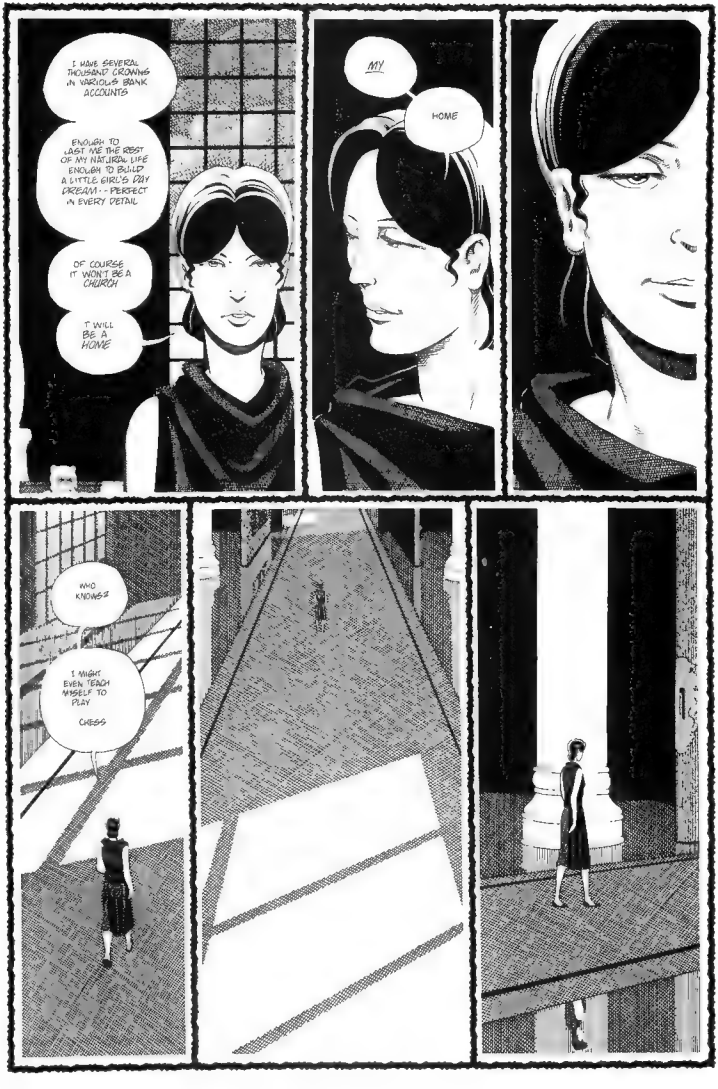
YOU JUST MADE THAT UP.
UH-UH.
THAT FUR-COVERED POCKET BETWEEN YOUR LEGS
WHERE YOUR PENIS SITS WHEN YOU AREN'T ERECT OR URINATING...
IT'S A VAGINA.

CIRIN IS REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT
THAT'S QUITE ENOUGH, ASTORIA
QUITE ENOUGH
YOU'VE CAUSED NOTHING BUT TROUBLE SINCE..
UNH
CAN'T BUTTERBALL
EVEN ELVIS AIN'T SO MEAN THIS
TONK.
CIRIN IS REASONABLY CERTAIN THAT YOU COULD IMPREGNATE YOURSELF
AND THAT THE RESULTANT OFFSPRING WOULD BE AN AARDVARK
IT'S NOW A MATTER OF HUMAN WITH NO AARDVARKIAN TRAITS
IT'S WHY SHE'S SO AFRAID OF YOU-- SHE CAN'T CREATE A RACE OF AARDVARKS
BUT THERE'S A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT YOU COULD
YOUR--PLUMBING-- ISN'T IN THE CORRECT CONFIGURATION
AN ERECTION SEALS OFF YOUR UTERUS BUT CIRIN HAS THE TECHNOLOGY FOR ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION.
AS LONG AS I'M LAYING ALL THE CARDS ON THE TABLE --
I WAS AT MY MOST FERTILE WHEN I PROVOKED YOU INTO 'RAPING' ME
I DIDN'T GET PREGNANT
THERE'S NO WAY TO TELL IF YOU'RE INFERTILE IF I AM
OR IF IT WAS JUST ONE OF THOSE THINGS

PO WAS RIGHT
IF I'M HONEST WITH MYSELF, I'VE ONLY EVER WANTED POWER FOR ITS OWN SAKE...
OSTENSIBLY I WANTED TO DESTROY CIRIN
AS HER PROTEGÉ I CAME TO DESPISE HER AND THE VERY IDEA OF MOTHERHOOD.
I USED EVERYONE SHE KEPT TABS ON - EVERYONE WHO SHE FELT WAS A THREAT TO HER...
I MARRIED LORD JULIUS
SOLELY TO SET UP A REVILLIST EMPIRE FROM WITHIN PALNIL...
I SEDUCED ARTEMIS AND USED HIM TO EXECUTE MATRIARCHAL SYMPATHISERS
I SEDUCED HER SON AND MADE HIM MY GLORIFIED ERRAND BOY...
WHEN YOU TURNED UP IN TEST, I ENGINEERED YOUR RISE TO POWER
I SURROUNDED YOU WITH REVILLISTS AND OUR SYMBOLS
ULTIMATELY, I EVEN BECAME THE WESTERN PONTIFF...
A SHORT WHILE AGO, THE ENTIRE CITY BOWED DOWN TO ME-- HAILED ME AS THE MESSIAH
JUST LOOK
I HAVEN'T EVEN MADE A DENT IN HER
POWER
IT WAS MY PROXIMITY TO YOU THAT MADE EVERYTHING... HAPPEN
I COULDN'T DIRECT IT AND I COULDN'T CONTROL IT...
DOCUMENTS CHANGED BEFORE MY EYES WHEN YOU WERE AROUND.
I'D SIT AND STARE AT THE WORDS AND GRADUALLY, I'D BE CONVINCED THAT THEY HAD ALWAYS SAID WHAT THEY SAID
BUT I KNEW IT WASN'T TRUE.
EVERYTHING FELL INTO PLACE AROUND YOU -- BUT THE MOMENT YOU MOVED ON...
IT ALL FELL BACK INTO DISORDER AND CHAOS
THAT'S WHAT PO MEANT WHEN HE SAID THAT YOU CAN ONLY CONTROL YOURSELF
POWER OVER OTHERS IS AN ILLUSION -- FOOLISHNESS
IF YOU CHOOSE POWER, YOU WILL RISE LIKE AN AIR BUBBLE IN A GLASS OF WATER.
ALWAYS..

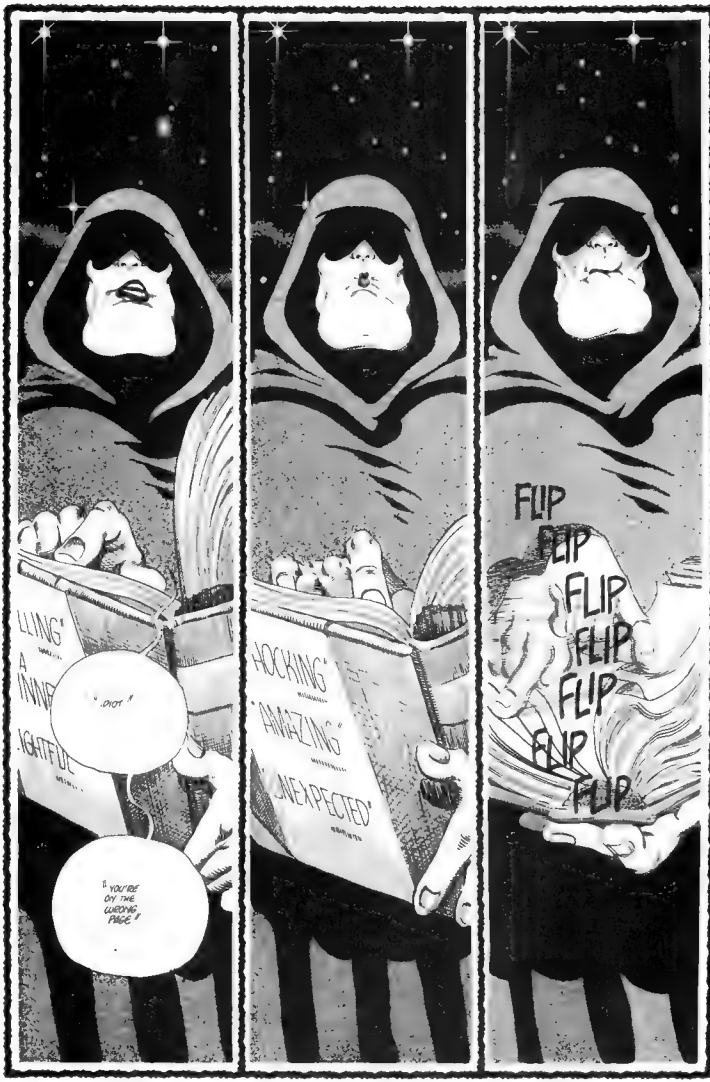
BUT YOU'VE ALWAYS FIND THE SAME THING YOU FOUND AS PRIME MINISTER
AND, I'M SURE, AS POPE
IT'S A CHARADE
A STIFLING, NEGLATING, FRUSTRATING PRACTICAL JOKE FROM TERRA.
OR TARIM
DOES IT REALLY MATTER WHETHER IT'S A GOD
OR A GODDESS
WHO'S LAUGHING AT YOU?
THAT'S IT
NO MORE TALK
YOU TWO HAVE FUN, OKAY?
PLAY NICE

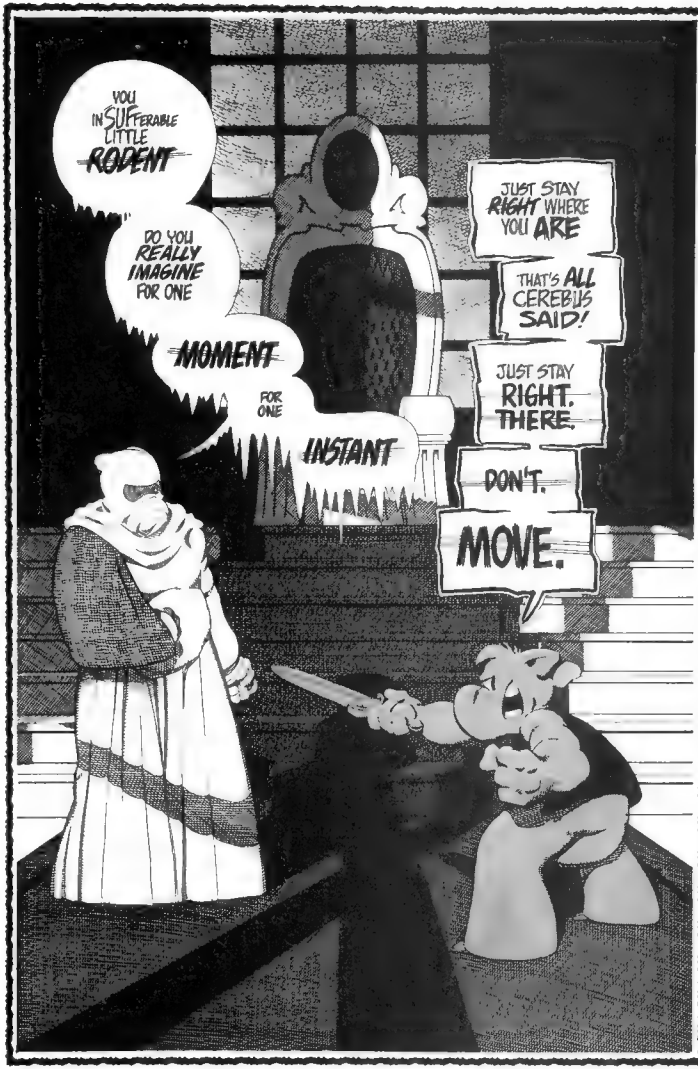
WHO'S
WHERE WILL YOU GO?
JUST BEFORE I CAME HERE, I REMEMBERED A ..
DAYDREAM I USED TO HAVE
AS A LITTLE GIRL
I WANTED TO BUILD MY OWN CHURCH OPEN TO THE SKIES
LIKE A COURTYARD AN ART ANIMAL PRESERVE AND GARDEN ALL IN ONE
JUST THE THOUGHT OF IT MADE ME FEEL AS IF A GREAT WEIGHT HAD BEEN LIFTED FROM MY SHOULDERS
AND THEN I REALIZED IT DIDN'T HAVE TO STAY A DAYDREAM
I COULD HAVE IT AND A SMALL HOUSE BUILT BY THE SPRING
EXACTLY THE WAY I'VE ALWAYS PICTURED THEM..


I HAVE SEVERAL THOUSAND CROWNS IN VARIOUS BANK ACCOUNTS
ENOUGH TO LAST ME THE REST OF MY NATURAL LIFE
ENOUGH TO BUILD A LITTLE GIRL'S PRAY DREAM - - PERFECT IN EVERY DETAIL
OF COURSE IT WON'T BE A CHURCH
IT WILL BE A HOME
MY
HOME
WHO KNOWS?
I MIGHT EVEN TEACH MYSELF TO PLAY
CHESS

YOU KNOW ARTIFICIAL INSEMINATION ISN'T THE ONLY POSSIBILITY
ONCE I'M GONE
THERE'S NOTHING TO PREVENT THE TWO OF YOU FROM TRYING IT...
THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

"AND HER FINAL INCARNATION WAS FEMALE.....SHE HAD BECOME KAY$ARAH $ARAH"
"WHICH (IN AN ANCIENT PICTISH DIALECT MEANS)"
"SHE"
'RIVETING'
'GRIPPING'
'VIVID'
'OF-THE-IMPOSSIBLY-LARGE-HOOTERS"
"AND-THE-BIG-BOOK-WHICH-GIVES-AWAY-THE-ENDINGS-OF-ALL-STORIES"
"BUT-WHICH-CONTAINS NO-SPOILER-WARNINGS' FOR-DON-THOMPSON"
"GOD AND GODDESS DESCENDED TOWARDS HER FROM UNHEAVEN..."
"IT WAS THE END OF ALL DAYS..."
"THEIR VOICES WERE THE SWEETEST OF MUSIC..."
"WHISPERING TO HER..."
"SPEAKING UNTO HER"
"AND SAYING"


LLING"
A
INVI
IGHTFUL
"...DIOT."
"YOU'RE ON THE WRONG PAGE!"
HOCKING"
"AMAZING"
UNEXPECTED"
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP
FLIP


YOU INSUFFERABLE LITTLE RODENT
DO YOU REALLY IMAGINE FOR ONE MOMENT FOR ONE INSTANT
JUST STAY RIGHT WHERE YOU ARE
THAT'S ALL CEREBUS SAID!
JUST STAY RIGHT. THERE.
DON'T.
MOVE.

AARDVARK COMMENT

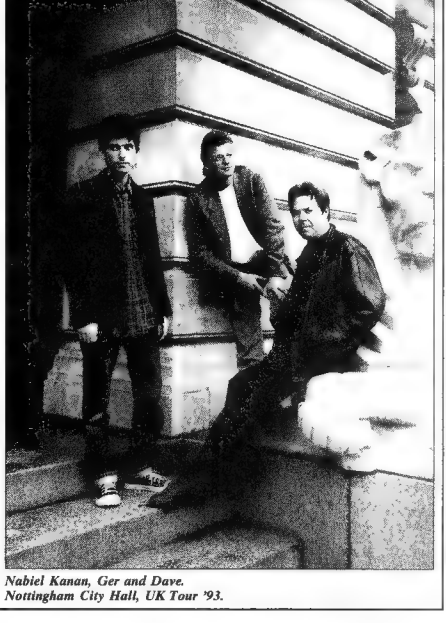
P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dear Dave AND GERHARD!!

Well, here it is, my first 'Dear Dave' letter. As is the custom I think I should give you a brief rendition of my *Cerebus* reading I first read *Cerebus* in 1990 in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* book #3 (reprint). (Whaddya mean 'Mainstream'! Turtles paved the way for an explosion in the black and white comics market and this probably gained you a few more readers than normal with your work in *T.M.N.T.* #8!! Mirage only prints about 5 titles so they're still an "Indie" in my book!). I had heard of *Cerebus* before, but only the name. It took me 3 years to read an actual issue of *Cerebus* when I asked a friend who started his own comic store (shop-comic shop; I'm British therefore it is a SHOP!) and I ordered your fine publication. Unfortunately this never arrived, nor the t-shirt I ordered later. BUT we had one issue in stock (#160 - *Mothers and Daughters* #10) and I was hooked. Talk about in at the DEEP END! Another shop opened up soon afterwards and the guy who runs it was a *Cerebus* fan. I bought a few issues of *High Society* from him and he also got me *Swords* #1 & 4 and *Cerebus* #56 at bargain prices (Hi . . . uh, Merlin from *Merlin's*.) I don't know, you wait ages for a comic shop then 2 come along at once. Unfortunately the first shop (as if by magic) shut down after about 8 months (serves it right for selling mainly X-titles and crap TSR games — sorry Jammy but it had to be said!). Slowly but surely my collection built up.

Anyway to the reason I'm writing. I came to see you on your 'Aardvarks over UK Tour '93' at the *Fantastic Store* in Nottingham. Not content with reading your excellent comic I travelled 75+ miles to say "I love you, Dave" in a purely respectful platonic way, of course! There I picked up some *Mothers & Daughters* back issues and a signed *Melmoth* t-shirt, poster, etc. . . . and was going to ignore Paul Grist and Nabiel Kane but I began flicking through *Kane* and *Exit* respectively. I was unsure whether to purchase these comics (*Kane* in particular) when Steve Holland (or Mark Simpson, one of the two) recommended *Exit* very highly. I couldn't turn this down without looking like a dork, so I picked up a copy of said comix and got them signed and so on. I read *Exit* first and saw it was previewed in *Cerebus* #168 which I had also bought. This got me thinking that as I enjoyed both the Preview and the *Exit* I bought, I pictured myself sitting at home reading #168's Preview and thinking, "Damn, this is good! Why didn't I buy this at the *Fantastic Store* at the signing! Fuck me, what an idiot!!!" So thanks to Fantastic staff I met two fantastic comics. I urge anybody to obey the recommendations of the staff at these shops! I totally agreed with Steve Holland's letter in #165 as I related it to above experience.

Secondly, I want to thank Gerhard (and yourself) for visiting our delightful island — hope you enjoyed your time here! Thirdly, I was reading #164 the other night (which meant I overslept and was late for college again!) and I came across a letter that said shops should promote Indies and buy less X-titles and so on, and then the very next day (today!) I was in *Merlin's* and he said he was



Nabiel Kanan, Ger and Dave.
Nottingham City Hall, UK Tour '93.

going to start ordering more independents and promote them instead of Marvel crap (some D.C. is okay I suppose) which is the self same thing the letter in #164 said! Scary huh? (The letter was by Mark Lucas.)

Also in #164 M'Oak wrote about his experience at Art College — how they don't teach you how to draw and I realized I'm going through the same thing now! I'm not going to pack it in though, it could still be useful and there are a lot of cute women there too! Way back in #160 (my first issue — remember!) a wise old English sage named Mike Siver helped me get through something I was going through at the time, 'nuff said. Ta Mike! Oh and that bit that comes before Aardvark Comment, that's okay too.

Mike Beckett (NO relation to Samuel)

154, Brereton Avenue
Cuecthorpes,
S Humberside
DN35 7RG
United Kingdom

P.S. Merlin (what is his name, I'll have to ask sometime!) Chris! has asked me to do a page on *Cerebus* for a fanzine he's putting out, I'm reet chuffed! 12:20 am. Time for sleep before college . . . or just one more issue of *Cerebus* . . .

P.P.S. What's pink and hard? — A cat with a flick knife!

P.P.P.S. How do you stop a vegetarian from spitting? — Turn the grill down!!

P.T.O.

P.P.P.P.S. Tom (Hi Tom you wonderful human being!) has just finished telling me about his meeting with you at *Fantastic Store* in Nottingham and how you said (putting on dodgy Canadian accent . . .) "Good bye Dave McKean and Bill Sienkiewicz," of course that's a paraphrase but nevertheless I'm jealous as fuck! I haven't seen any of his work but I can't see his jam with you!

P.P.P.P.P.S. Drinking scotch is seriously bad for your elf. It's October 18th and I'm finally posting this letter!

Thanks for the kind words. I'm looking forward to seeing issues of *Exit* and *Kane* myself on a regular basis. I also hope Tom finds a way to publish his work, it was quite nice as I recall (I'm a big McKean and Sienkiewicz fan).

★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave Sim and fellow *Cerebus* Creators,

Actually, I thought the letter column was more interesting when you weren't replying to the letters. The mail you were getting seemed more interesting somehow, more chaotic. There was a free form give and take that was fun to watch. Reminding one somewhat of a bulletin board or similar dial-in computer service. I miss those days to a degree. By the same token, though, it *was*-a nice change when you did begin to reply to letters again. Perhaps you'd consider not replying to letters for awhile just to stir things up a tad?

On another point, I've always wondered if there was some reason that you did not establish a sort of *Cerebus* trading post in the back pages of the book? Where readers of the book, perhaps for a nominal fee of some kind, could put in their *Cerebus* related "wants" and "for sales". I, myself, would prefer to see some of my collection go to fellow fans of the book, who are hopefully motivated by affection, rather than pass through the hands of dealers, who seem more motivated by money than anything else. (Besides which, from what I understand dealers would want to give me credit in trade for my collection. Credit does little good to someone who reads no other comic books.)

Incidentally, I've been reading *Cerebus* since the first issue. It's a little strange to think that I was a callow teenager when the series began, and now I'm an old fart in my mid-thirties with a wife 'n' child 'n' job-with-great-responsibility. It's strange though to me that the few things that have stayed the same through all those years, is it really 16? or do I misremember?, are my sense of self, my own creative urges, and reading this thing called *Cerebus* once every month.

If you'd care to print this letter, or part thereof, I'd appreciate it if you'd mention that I'd like to hear from old friends/acquaintances April Tortorello, Judith Bradford, Tom Muck, Peter Kuhl, Chris Neal, or Mary Lee Chilstrom if they see this and would like to write. And if Nicole Kilisch in Wien writes me, I should be able to get her a fairly recent address for Micky DuPree.

I enjoy your work and look forward to seeing more of it.

Sincerely,

James Norman Spielberg
371 Woodward Ave. SE
Atlanta, GA
USA 30312

P.S. Wouldn't mind sending greetings to fellow readers Jason Sacks, Larry Dudock, and Bruce Canwell, either.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I've been meaning to write for a while now, and issue 174 finally got me round to it. *Women* concluded on a high note with the threesome of Astoria, Cerebus and Suenteus Po entering the building. It opens up a lot of possibilities, and I'm eagerly looking forward to what happens from 175 on.

It was some of the letters in Aardvark Comment that really prompted this letter. I'd had a long day and was feeling tired, not looking forward to going to work in the morning. On top of that I felt lonely after a day full of memories. I read Rev. Gregory's letter, and the passage about the kiss made me smile because it's so damn right. His second letter struck me as painfully familiar, particularly the part about their future plans that aren't going to work out.

There's a women, I'll call her Michelle, with whom I fell, finally, truly in love. I wanted to spend the rest of my life with her, to have children with her. It never worked out, and now Michelle is with another guy, and she's very happy. I want her happiness more than anything, but I kind of hoped I could have been part of that, you know? It's taking me a long time to get used to the idea, but I'm getting there.

Then Emma's letter really got to me, and I cried. I haven't done that in a long time. Different people, different place, the same old story about two people, repeating itself all over again. The *Cerebus* phone books I'd ordered arrived the other day, including *Jaka's Story*. It's always been a favourite of mine, as it captures the feeling and emotion so well. I can identify with the little grey guy, and I was moved upon re-reading it. I wanted to share *Jaka's Story* with Michelle, but now that's gone too.

The point of it all is that I just want to thank Rev. Gregory and Emma, along with those

people who choose to share a piece of their lives with us in Aardvark Comment.

On a high note, I was absolutely delighted to read you and Gerhard will be at OZCON III in Sydney next year. I'll start saving now so I can fly across the Tasman and be there in February. I'll bring the phone books for autographs and I'll try to corner you for a sketch if you're not too busy. Is there anything you can tell me about OZCON, or perhaps someone I can contact in Sydney about it? I'd appreciate any details you can give.

See you in Sydney,

Maarten Dijkstra
18 Dennis Avenue
Manurewa
Auckland 1702
New Zealand

P.S. If you should read this, Michelle, I wish you all the best.

I must apologize to the OZCON organizers for getting the dates wrong in the November and December issues. By the time this issue comes out, it will be too late to give you information on OZCON, but I hope I see/saw you there.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

Wow. I'm actually writing a letter that will be read by an actual creator. Let me pause a moment to let this soak in . . .

I'm never good at addressing persons such as yourself, so please bear with me if I'm a little incoherent. It's just that I spent so long as a Zombie, used to thinking of the creators as these awesome immortal people that were on about the same level as Steven Spielberg and the President, people to be talked about in myths and bedtime stories but never seen, let alone conversed with by mere mortals like myself. "Bow to the mighty writer of *Thor* . . . er, I mean *Fantastic Four* . . . um, *Alpha Flight*, rather . . ."

Well, I'm a LITTLE older now, and I just have to tell you that it's so comforting to know that real, human people create comics, and good ones at that. It's much easier to aspire to be somebody who's working out of their garage. Somebody with a lot of talent yet not a deity, somebody who actually goes to the supermarket for food and occasionally drops a container of yogurt on the floor, splattering it everywhere (not that I ever did or anything . . .). Somebody with as much determination as ability, who entirely earned their rep as The Word in self-publishing. It boosts my dreams of doing my own self-publishing someday knowing that all it takes is ability and talent, two things I'm really trying to develop/acquire. So, in summary, Dave — Thanks. Your hard work is great appreciated.

Also, regarding somebody's letter a little while ago, I'd have to disagree — I think that Marvel, DC, Valiant, and Image's superhero stuff serves only as a stepping stone on the way to good books, and anyone who reads the stuff for prolonged periods of time into their adulthood is either extremely easy to please or has such an undying Zombie allegiance to some company (I've got many friends like this) that they refuse to let their tastes mature. Don't get me wrong, there have been bright spots in the last decade from the Big Two — *Watchmen*, *The Dark Knight Returns*, Peter David's *Hulk*, Claremont's *Uncanny X-Men*, and that's about it. Of course, if you regard comics as art galleries, then that's a totally different nightmare . . .

I guess that brings me to the real point of this letter. I'm 15, I've been reading comics as long as I can remember, and I feel totally out of place! My days of Zombieism are long past, my infatuation with "superheroes" as well, but almost all my friends are still in the "Doesn't Gambit kick butt?" stage. I hold no "allegiances" to any title or company. I've seen/read all aspects of the "Creator vs. Publisher" and "Industry as a Whole" sagas, and my friends are still saying "If Marvel kills Ghost Rider, I swear I'll not read the issue!" My favorite titles at the moment are *Cerebus*, *Bone*, *The Maximortal*, *The Tick*, *New World Order*, *Xenozoic Tales*, *Nestrobber* (where's #2??), *Madman/Madman Adventures*, *Tales of the Beanworld*, *Miracleman*, *Mighty Magnor*, and *Milk & Cheese*. "I heard that Punisher dies soon!" AARGHH!!!

I enjoy modern music, like going to dances and hanging around, and enjoy a multitude of sports. Yet, in this one aspect of myself, I feel like I'm 95 years old. Even on Prodigy, the place that introduced me to alot of my comic-reading friends, the BBS are clogged with "X-Men clubs" and people talking about how exceptional the latest X-Force was. (If anybody cares, I'm RVSN41C and would enjoy the conversation.) What's wrong with me? It used to give me a false sense of pride, knowing I read comics more 'mature' than the rest of my peers. Now it's just plain spooky. I have exactly 1 friend with similar tastes to mine, but he's having a little trouble giving up superheroes (just read *Watchmen*, a big step in the right direction — right, Conrad?) I can't see, looking back, why anyone with more than a year or two reading comics could continue to buy all this work-made-for-hire crap, but why can't they see it?

Well, I've wasted enough of your time. Thanks a million, Mr. Sim, just for doing what you've done and doing it so well. I'd love to get in touch with someone in a situation at all similar to mine (or anyone, really). And *High Society* will always be one of my all-time favorite stories.

Sincerely,

Ross Snyder
R.D. #1, Box 406A
Bernville, PA
USA 19506

Ross's phone lines are open. And speaking of phone lines being open, the Hepcats Weekend Telethon which was only advertised in *Cerebus* brought in a little over $6,000 dollars US over the forty-eight hour period. Martin 'nose to the grindstone' Wagner thanks you all.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

Thanks loads for the plug in the letters page of issue 175! I was flattered, my friends were impressed. I'm looking forward to seeing how many orders your endorsement gets me.

I was a little dismayed to hear about you tossing out a pile of correspondence you fell behind on. I know how it is. I have a bitch of a time replying to some of the less-involving letters I get about my comics, and that flow is at a thin trickle. But I became suddenly fearful that you might not have received the copy of *Longshot Comics* #1 I sent you. You'd remember it if you saw it. Eighty-four pages? Three thousand, eight hundred and forty panels.? The world's first truly epic mini-comic?

I thought you might want to take a

look at this first in the world of self-publishing. Drop me a line if you didn't get it and I'll rush along another copy. Hey, if you like my work as much as you say, it's a must. The critical acclaim for it has already swelled my head to an unpardonable size.

Blargga,

Shane Simmons
733 43rd Avenue
Lachine, Quebec
Canada H8T 2J5

I just know as soon as this sees print that someone else will step forward, laying claim to the title 'world's first truly epic mini-comic.' Out of the three thousand four hundred and eighty panels, there were only a handful that I thought didn't 'work'. Seriously, everyone should have a copy of this once-in-a-lifetime magnum opus.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave;

I started reading Ayn Rand's *Fountainhead* on Saturday night, and read for about an hour before I went to sleep. I decided almost immediately that I like it immensely, but managed to put it down at midnight. *The Fountainhead* had been recommended to me a couple of years ago, and I had not picked it up yet. I had the impression that it was political commentary. It is that, but it is also a good story. Sound familiar? I picked it up again at about 8:30 Sunday morning when I woke up so that I would not go back to sleep, and read pretty much continuously until 1:30 AM that night. I did manage to stop and eat lunch and dinner.

I was reading at The Coffee Merchant, a local coffee house, and my roommate mentioned that I seemed to like the book. I replied that it was in my top five favorites so far, although I couldn't name the other four while sitting there. I don't know if you have had a similar feeling, but when I read a good book, reality seems to take the tone of the novel. This book made me happy. I am not sure why, but I'll figure it out. This letter is part of that process. That night as I was walking to the local burrito joint, Tio Alberto's, the crisp air was especially enjoyable. The world was more vivid, the buildings more interesting; my existence and solitude at that moment was more enjoyable than the many times that I had made the same walk.

I was laying awake in bed that night and decided on four favorite novels but not a fifth. Forgive me fellow fans, but *Cerebus* was not among those that I first thought of. When I did think of *Cerebus*, I thought first that *Melmoth* would have to be the best. I was not sure whether it could stand on its own for the reasons that I found it so enjoyable. I enjoyed *Melmoth* in the same way one enjoys suspense or sexual tension. It wasn't what was there, it is what was not there. For me the best parts of *Melmoth* were those with Cerebus. The lack of Cerebus in the rest of the story made the short visits with Cerebus more poignant, more amusing, thus making Cerebus' emergence at the end of *Melmoth* more powerful. Or am I stating the obvious — "Look a tree," said the man standing in a forest. This leads me to the conclusion that I would have to include *Cerebus* as a whole in my list of favorite novels. While a great story, *Melmoth* in and of itself does not attract me. What I like is its larger connection within the whole. *Melmoth* is my favorite part of *Cerebus*.

What does *Melmoth* have to do with *Fountainhead*? Very little. I did notice some interesting similarities, and differences, between yourself (or at best your public image) and the hero(?) in *The Fountainhead*. Howard Roark is an architect in the '20s. He has a vision, an ideal as to how buildings should be built. He is determined to be honest to the site, the building materials, the use of the building, but not to tradition. Traditional architecture for its own sake is slavish devotion to the irrelevant. He will have no part in it. His only desire it to build on his terms and as his ideals dictate. He will not dilute his vision with the base desires of his clients, the public, or anything else. He will succeed or fail on his work's merit. The fact that his attitudes may seem arrogant to others does not even enter his consciousness. He does not know whether he is seen as arrogant and cannot agree with its relevance in any case. The only relevant factors are his ideals and his ability to achieve his vision in steel, concrete and masonry.

Your writings suggest that you have a vision for the comics industry, for graphic artists and the integrity in which one's art should be pursued. Howard Roark would sooner give up architecture than prostitute himself and follow the establishment. Fortunately, you have not had to make such a decision. Although I see in your public persona a genuine concern and respect for your fans and followers (to a point) that the character Howard Roark lacks almost completely, the art and its integrity is the only focus possible. All else is commentary at best, and a distraction at least. (I've borrowed this last phrase from somewhere but don't know where.)

These are some of the things that I find admirable in Howard Roark and the same virtues originally attracted me to *Cerebus*. Of course the story is engrossing and addictive. Of course the art is amazing and wonderful. But Dave Sim is an asshole in the best of all possible ways. Dave Sim has integrity, vision and determination. You are not afraid to tell people when they're counterproductive, irrelevant, or hypocritical. Although Roark has no desire to promote his vision or convert anyone to it, you seem to combine egoism and pragmatism in a productive manner. I do not mean to idolize you, nothing and no one deserves worship, but a healthy respect for those who possess admirable qualities is not unjustified.

I've always found egoism as a philosophy to be attractive, and at the same time repulsive. The real motive in reading Ayn Rand is to qualify these feelings and to incorporate them into my world view i.e. philosophy. I am very pleased to find that *The Fountainhead* is also very good reading.

Oh, my five favorite novels are, in no particular order, *Skinny Legs and All* — Tom Robins, *Cerebus*, *The World According to Garp* — the book not the movie, *The Case Against God* — George Smith, and so far *The Fountainhead* — Ayn Rand.

On a completely different note, have you tried my beer yet? If not, all of its good by now. We had a beer tasting last week of all my beers, and 3 or 6 months aging does wonders for home brew. Highly recommended.

Have a nice day,

David Martin
868 3/8 Upham Drive
San Luis Obispo, CA
USA 93401

The beer was great. Thanks. It took me a long time to learn that it's better to form natural, loose alliances if you're trying to change an existing system (i.e. the direct market) than it is to start with the supposition that everyone is against you. When you go into everything with an antagonistic demeanour, people will usually live down to your lowest expectations of them. Live and learn.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

So, discussing the storyline is a no-no, huh? Hey, I can live with that. Anyway, I sit here at my typewriter, writing away to my few fave books, and I wonder why Comment is so different. It continues to perplex me, almost as much as Cerebus' appearance in *1963: Book Six (Tomorrow Syndicate)*. Hey, what do I know?

#175's back cover was the best one in recent memory (considering that recent memory for me is, like, yesterday), since I have always wanted to see the real Colleen Doran. So this is what an artist who does odd-jobs at D.C. looks like, huh? Hey Colleen, what's next on the agenda? *The Outsiders?* Maybe *Eclipso* (whoops, you already did that one)? How about *Chain Gang War?* Nah, that's too far out.

Keeping his mouth shut about the storyline,

Damin J. Toell
53 Lockwood Ave.
South Farmingdale, NY
USA 11735

P.S. *Eclipso, Valor,* and *Legionnaires* are all great books, Colleen. I was just joking with you. Yeah. Whatever.

Just in case everyone isn't in on the joke yet, Colleen doesn't smoke or drink. I told her I was printing a 'revenge' photo on the back cover and she said 'oh, no. You ran the picture that makes me look fat.' I said no and told her the photo I was using. 'oh, the one that makes me look like a slut (hysterical laughter).' Colleen's a good sport.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Here are a few thoughts on comic signings, and the wisdom one gains from them. I have only been to 2; one to meet Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons at the height of their *Watchmen* fame, and the other to meet you when you came to *Fantastic Store* in London on September 15th. I found the differences between the 2 very striking, although that's more likely to be down to changes in me than in comicdom. When I went to get my cherished copies of *Watchmen* signed, I happily queued up for nearly 3 hours, chatting away with all and sundry about the latest hot copies of *Batman Year 2* I had just bought. When I approached the table to get my comics signed, I was so full of awe at being next to the great Alan Moore, that the most thought-provoking question I could come up with was, "what projects are you working on next?" It didn't bother me then, because I was happy enough about having increased the value of my mint copy of issue 1. When I came to see you at *Fantastic Store* however, it was all different. Whereas before I had expert knowledge of what was happening in the comic world from the 10 or so titles I bought every 2 weeks, nowadays, bar the odd issue of *Hate* or *Yummy Fur, Cerebus* is the only comic I buy, so all of the X-creation specials that Marvel had to offer, as well as Superman dying and being replaced by lots more supermen, mostly passed me by. I only recently realised why lots of *Spawn* fans have discovered "Serbius", when I saw the cute lil grey feller on a front cover. This lack of interest in most things comic-related meant that I was much less enthusiastic about standing around for 3 hours, and I could understand passers-by in their disbelief more easily. — Typical passer-by vs. fan dialogue; Man: "Why are you all queueing up?" Fan: "It's a signing" Man: "oh yeah? — who's signing?" Fan: "Dave Sim" Man: "who?"

(maybe your campaign 94 t-shirts should be "yeah? well Dave Sim has never heard of you either!") just kidding

Anyway, after the first hour of waiting, I thought that if I'd waited this long, I might as well stick it out, and the old excitement creeped back. This time it wasn't the thought of doubling the value of my comics with your signature that got me all squidgy (why did Princess Diana lower the tone of such a great word by calling her lover that?). I can't see myself selling my cerebi, and besides, I couldn't be bothered carrying my whole collection into central London for you to get armache signing. No, what got my juices flowing (if you'll pardon the expression) was the prospect of getting a peek into the mind of the creator of what may be seen in more broadminded times, as a literary great — greater even than the Roach's psychiatric bills (I really liked Cirin's "you filthy little boy" outburst). Admittedly the insight I got into your views on feminism and the oppressive matriarchy of the Cirinists was limited given our brief chat, but your comments gave me definite food for thought. I certainly agree with you that you make orange juice out of oranges and apple juice from apples, but I'm not sure if the analogy follows through entirely to mean that men and women are totally different. The way I see it is that we're stuck between the devil and the deep blue sea. On the one hand I'm very wary of the idea of androgyny, because it is simply ridiculous to deny the reasonable assumption that the obvious physical differences between the sexes, will cause different situations that will possibly affect each in separate ways. However, it is possible to take these differences and use them as a basis for discrimination, and I have seen all too much of both negative and positive discrimination (I only use the word positive here for easy differentiation, as I think that positive discrimination by definition involves discriminating against another group). I went to a University that revelled in political correctness to such a degree that I was not allowed to vote in certain student union elections because of my sex, or the colour of my skin. It made me realise that just because you stand up and criticise the evils of the patriarchal system, it by no means ensures that you are free from prejudices. I personally think that everyone has prejudices of some sort, and only be becoming aware of them, and not adopting a holier-than-thou attitude, can we combat them. Without wanting to preach, I'd say that the differences between men and women need to be respected, not exploited for good or bad. After all where would all the fun be if we all became genderless and reproduced asexually? No more gossip about who snogged who in the bushes and no more pleading your would-be partner to understand that you're not always Mr. Floppy, you've just drunk a bit too much. By the way how do

new-age feminist men have sex? Is it a case of "I'm sorry for 2000 years of oppressive patriarchy — I hope my penis isn't oppressing you too much — I do feel guilty that it's not smaller, because size is a sexist concept"? I hope not, or come the cirinist revolution (it could happen here too kids — you know what they say — "truth is stranger than fiction") I will become celibate. Mind you, Cirin would probably have a few more harsh words in store if I started conducting experiments into the effect of *Playboy* on the morally pure.

There were loads more things I wanted to elaborate on, but I think I'll leave them to my next instalment to keep you hungry for more (not). So ta-ta for now and thanks for the little sketch of Mrs. Thatcher you did for me at the signing. By the way I disagree with a letter someone wrote you a while back, saying that Margaret Thatcher was a good example of unfemininity. Was being a strong leader displaying a lack of femininity? I hope not as this is the first step on the slippery path to stereotypes. Granted, she did not further the cause of women's rights much with her outdated emphasis on Victorian family values and I would find it very hard to think of anything she did that I agree with, but the simple fact that a woman can govern the country (however badly) will surely be an inspiration that women do not need to display stereotypical behaviours to get anywhere in life. Sorry, that "by the way" was a wee bit long.

OK, live long and prosper, don't talk to strange men offering to buy the rights to your comic, and be nice to Gerhard (I can't wait for your interior of a submarine background, Ger. Why don't you go the whole way and do a sketch of the battle of Midway to one of Dave's more serious panels?). bye bye bouncy boo boo,

Chris Bunny

Although we didn't have a great deal of time to chat, I do remember the conversation. The sound byte referred to is the one I use in answer to 'don't you think men and women are equal?' I said that it's like asking if apples and oranges are equal. If you want to make an applie pie, oranges are not of much use. If you want to make orange juice, apples are not going to do you much good. I think the feminization of men which has taken place over the last few decades has been detrimental to the male gender. I don't dispute anyone's right to be sensitive, caring, love-sick and nurturing but I really think it's a one-way trip to Michael Jacksonland. Brr.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave Sim,

I guess I could start off with telling how great *Cerebus* is. But I won't do that, because everybody else does that, and I want this letter to be unique. Ah, well.

But I *can* tell you that *Cerebus* has changed my viewpoint of comics. Formerly, I read a bunch of Marvels, Image, Dark Horse, and DC's *Sandman*. Still do, for the most part. But you, Gerhard and *Cerebus* just had to open my eyes, didn't you? Now I've met *Bone*, which is really good, and am about to start reading all the trade backs of *Sandman* (thanks to having a birthday and all, of course.)

Needless to say, I've become quite addicted to the little gray fellow, as many before me have, and many after me will. In fact, *Cerebus* #0 was a lifesaver, since my local comic shop forgot I was a subscriber one month and didn't reserve me a copy of #172. Thus, they give me #0 and I'm blown away. It was really good, by the way. Just so you know.

You've probably been besieged by hundreds, if not thousands of new fans and subscribers thanks to Todd McFarlane and *Spawn*. I too read #10, but that's not why I became addicted. *Cerebus* #164 was recommended to me at a local comic book convention by one of the guys there. After reading it, I realized what was happening. Swoon had me howling into the night as I read and reread the book. I quickly discovered that I need more. Much more. Which is why you should find a money order for $190, Canadian, with this letter. Obviously, it's for all the phone books, *Cerebus* through *Flight*, with postage and handling stuck in as well. Besides, if that much money doesn't get this thing printed, I don't know what will.

Oh, and by the way, I don't know if you've come to the Washington D.C. metropolitan area recently, but we need you, Dave. My local comic shop, *Fanklin Farms* (hi, guys), doesn't stock nearly enough *Cerebus*. There's just not much demand for it here, even with all the *Valiant* fans. After all, the price is the same, and with better story to boot. So whatever you're still doing in regards to Campaign '93, or whatever is planned for '94, I'd like to take part in. Just so that other people will know what *Cerebus* addiction is like.

In closing, I could do the normal thing and say something like "Till #300". But I won't. I will admit, however, that I'm looking forward to #175.

Sincerely,

Bud Conklin
4085 Braxton Road
Chantilly, VA
USA 22021

Well, I'm not saying that a cheque for $190 will get your letter printed in Aardvark Comment and I'm not saying it won't. But, if anyone wants to test out the theory, our phone lines are open (heh heh).

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Hey there! Nice job on #173 & 174 (aka the "AAAA!!! AAAAAAAA!!!!!!" issue) you should get an award for "most parodies in a single panel" for "everything roach." ("Don Simpson royalty check roach"? ha!) Cerebus hitting the bird in mid-air was a great touch; stuff we never see flying characters deal with! Showing po's hands as he lifted his hood kinda telegraphed that revelation, but I still gaped when I realized who it was. Jeeez! Absolutely can't wait for #175!

Me, I've been beaucoup busy lately. Kicked butt on finishing *E* #1; just made deadline! Copies enclosed for you and Ger, hope you like it. Although *E* is a mini-comic, I'm working on establishing a presence in comix shops nationwide as of this writing, *E* #1 is available at *Einstein's Comics* in Rowlett, Texas (Thanks to James Echols' letter in CBG #1033); I sent sampler packages to 6 more stores in various states, I'm getting names and addresses for 3 more sp-friendly stores here in PA and 2 in NY. Also, Michael Rizzo of COMX TV (a cable-tv comix show in Buffalo, NY) wrote and asked to be put on my mailing list. Pretty neat, eh? I'm enjoying every minute of it. Everyone I've dealt with so far has been very encouraging and helpful. (Especially James Echols, who gave away copies of my freebie zine, *Eric's . . . Mini-comic* #1, to every one of his sub service

customers! James is good people.) Ironically, I'm getting more (and better) exposure/response as a small press creator than I ever got when I was working professionally! Go figure.

Now, I'm just trying to get caught up on answering mail and sending out comp copies (like these).

That's it for now, you and Ger take care and keep up the good work!

Eric Hess
211 Pauline Drive
Saltsburg, PA
USA 15681-8914

P.S. Hope to get to mid-Ohio con to see you. How much for a sketch of Donna Matrix Roach? (The whole concept is just too awful!)

Well, godammit, Eric; when you came up and introduced yourself at Mid-Ohio Con and I told you that I had just picked one of your letters for publication and there was SOMETHING important about it, E #1 is what I was talking about. Congratulations, but jeez — next time remind a guy why don't you?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Ha! You thought you were being so subtle, didn't you? Thought we wouldn't notice! Well, I figured it out; the Roach is Aleister Crowley! How did you see through my extremely clever subtlety, you ask. As I glanced at the cover of *Portable Darkness* (picture of Crowley with hands, made into fists, at his temples) I said to myself, "hey, that looks like Normalroach making antennae out of his fingers!"

Along this line, other interesting "coincidences". Crowley took a vow of poverty and was never able to get rich; when we first meet the bug, one of his personalities is hiding gold and his merchant/self is unaware of it. Thus, the bug is also keeping himself poor. Crowley favored mountain climbing; the bug carried statues from Weishaupt's basement to his attic! I'll be looking for other interesting "coincidences", believe you me.

Could we bring back references to the Men In Black? Please? I saw this movie, called *1984: Revisited*, for one of my classes; it contains sketched scenes from *1984*. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but the sketches of Winston Smith looked remarkably like you! Perhaps you should avoid Airstrip One, oops, I mean England, for awhile. What? You're already over there? Sorry, meant to warn you earlier but I got busy and, well, you know . . .

I was flipping channels the other morning when I saw a familiar figure. "Wolveroach!", I thought to myself (with exclamation point). I, of course, immediately realized I was mistaken; well, one of the characters referred to him as Wolverine, actually, Plus, he wasn't acting psychotic at all! He seemed quite a bit less insane than the bug; too bad. I decided to watch a bit anyway. Sort of cool to see the character Claremont is based on (cool in a one-time sense, that is). This is how it ended: the President saying that we should all play nice with the good mutants. Switch to scene of a mutant couple talking about "hope for the future" — rather sickeningly cute. Then a pull-back and you see them on a TV screen; "ah", I say to myself, "they're being cynical! They'll show mobs after the mutants in a minute." Then the evil villain-type makes some silly comment and my hopes were dashed. Why, I was expecting quality!

One last thing. Please print this because I am in horrible, horrible trouble. I've recently moved to DC and have no idea where the good comic shops (read: shops that actually carry issues of *Cerebus*!) are. The one near me carries it but sells out very quickly which means I've missed at least two issues! ARGHHHHHH! So, I need people to write me and say "why Judy, try this shop, conveniently located at . . ."

ttfn

ta ta for now

Judy Gibson
218 North Jordan St., #204
Alexandria, VA
USA 22304

P.S. To all those people that I owe letters to: please don't take it personally, procrastination (especially with regards to letter writing) runs in my family. If you write me again, I promise to answer.

Hey, 'Funky Shoes', you're still reading the book! All right! Bud Conklin swears by Franklin Farms (see letter above). Anyone else know a good store in Alexandria 'Funky Shoes' should check out?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave:

I hope Glenn doesn't feel like Operation Crazed Ferret is getting the "Stan Lee Presents" treatment here in the Campaign '93 column. I mean, he's done most (well ok, almost all) of the work on this thing. All I provided were the raw materials. But hey, he's romping around in the Middle East as you read this, and none the wiser. So . . .

Jim Ottaviani Presents:

Operation Crazed Ferret, All In Color for a Lot Less Than a Dime

Hey, remember Operation Crazed Ferret?

Remember how:

(1) having The Animated Cerebus on your own computer changed your life?

(2) displaying all three animated shorts on either Apple Macintoshes or "IBM"s running Windows made you a hit at parties with whichever sex you preferred to be a hit with?

(3) you posted it to networks and achieved instant local fame?

(4) you wished that Ted Turner could get his hands on those artful black & white images and colorize them beyond recognition?

No? Well then, wise up and join us as you get all of the above. Or at least (4).

Glenn Carnagey has completed the new, color versions of the animations and they look Sweet. (*) Glenn's way out of town, though, so as his major co-conspirator (though John Romkey deserves more-than-honorable mention for his work on the Windows version) I hereby announce their existence. You can anonymous ftp the animations from two places right now:

At asylum.sf.ca.us, in/pub/cerebus/crazed-ferret you'll find:

bar.avi & bar2 qt sea.hqx =
"A Well Equipped Bar"

bat.avi & bat2 qt sea hqx =
"Add One Mummified Bat"

sword avi & sword2 qt.sea hqx =
"His First Sword"

cerebus ps
vfwrun.zip

The .avi files work on "IBM"s running Windows (you'll need the vfwrun.zip file or its equivalent) and the .qt.sea.hqx files are for glorious full color Macs (you'll need the QuickTime Simple Player

or it's equivalent). cerebus.ps is a PostScript document full of information and insight.

At sunsite.unc.edu, in/pub/multi-media/pictures/OTIS/animations you can get:

bar qt cpt hqx
bat qt cpt.hqx
sword qt cpt hqx

We don't know what happened to the .avi files here, but these .qt.cpt.hqx files are the grayscale animations for Macs.

At both places, be sure to grab:

README
ferret.docs cpt hqx
ferret readme

These are similar versions of the same important message. Think of them as optional, free cover enhancements. They differ from your average die-cut foil-embossed holographically stamped premium editions in that the contents are worth reading.

Obviously, "asylum" should be your first choice of places to go.

heh.

But wherever you do it, do it loud. Spread the word. Campaign '93 ain't over until Dave says it's over. And he hasn't.

Enjoy, and regale me with success stories that I can pass along to others, both networked and otherwise. Keep the failure stories to yourself, if you please. (**)

That's the basic "ad" I sent out over the networks. As a special bonus for people who bought this book, nifty electronic sources of good comics news and discussion follow. I include this information because so many people have written me asking where they can join the discussion and find out more about *Cerebus* and other thoughtful comics

Cerebus Discussion List
<cerebi@erzo berkeley edu>

COMICS-LCOMICS Discussion List
<COMICS-
L%UNLVM BITNET@uicvm.uic.edu>

Comix for Grownupz
<comix@world std com>

seeya

jimO

<hellpop@engin umich edu>

(*) I provided him with the raw material and then let nature take its course. So don't, out of misplaced gratitude, make the mistake of sending money to Ted Turner.

(**) OK, that's unduly harsh. Send me a message and I'll try to help. But if you have problems with the Windows version don't expect much more than moral support and a referral.

Do you know how time-consuming it is proof-reading your letters, jimO? Thanks for dropping by the table at Mid-Ohio Con. Crazed Ferrets forever!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Well, you've finally done it. Prompted me to write a letter, that is. This is not so much to do with the furry one, however, but more with regard to something you said in the letters pages of no. 174.

In response to a rather downtrodden Rev. Flanders you said, "It really is best not to get too attached to anyone in your life". This comment really took me by surprise, and quite frankly astounded me. I first read the issue about a week ago and have been pondering over an appropriate response since then.

However, it was only today, while travelling home on the bus and attempting to compose a letter in my head that I suddenly realised — Hey!, Maybe you are right after all. I never thought I'd hear myself say that, but then I realised I've had nothing but heartbreak while having to leave friends behind changing schools, moving home, and then going to college.

The worst thing about starting college two years ago was leaving behind one of the best friends I ever had. I changed schools (yet again!) but meeting her was compensation enough. I'm sure everyone has been in the same situation. I saw her every day during the week and some weekends as well. I really hated to leave for home. For one of the first times in my life, I had a great reason to go to school. There was a lot of stuff going on in both our lives at the time and we provided an outlet for each other, and, naturally, we became very close.

Then.

That was it.

The year was finished, we did our Leaving Certs (Irish equivalent of SAT's) and got into separate colleges, me doing Architecture, she doing Applied Languages. I bet you can guess the rest. A story sadly similar to the one told by Rev. Flanders.

I do still see her occasionally and I still think of her as a close friend, but I know it will never be the same again. Things were too complicated for us to get involved, even though I wanted to. Besides, I think she knew then what it's taken me until now to figure out — that it never would have worked (Hey Emma — Guess what? You were right). I even tried to call her last night (Where were you?!) but it always seems that we have less and less to say to each other as time passes.

However, I do enjoy getting close to people, and since I've been in college I've made some very close friends. But thinking about things tonight, when we all finish in three or four years time, we really will be finished. We will walk out the door for the final time and slowly drift apart, reduced to chance meetings on dismal city streets and the occasional phone call.

The more I think about it, the further removed from my initial reaction I become, Dave, and tend to lie on your side of the fence. Even so, I can't help wondering how much more empty my life would have been without this girl in it. I really did love her. I just find it hard to come to terms with the inevitable pain of loss. Perhaps you are right. It might be easier to try and avoid becoming too attached. But what do you do when it's unavoidable?

Just one last thing before I must go, Dave. Aardvark Comment is the most fantastic letters column on the planet. Nowhere else is there the same variety of letters on so many subjects. I feel very envious of you. You get to touch all of these peoples lives in a profound way. Strange as it may seem, I find I have no trouble opening up to you.

May this never change.

Thanks for listening, Dave.

Mark O'Gara
76 Carysfort Downs,
Blackrock,
Co. Dublin,
Republic of Ireland

P.S. When is America going to wake up to Warrior Soul, surely one of the finest rock bands ever to grace us with their presence? Frontman Kory Clarke writes some of the most touching lyrics it has ever been my pleasure to hear.

P.P.S. I can confirm it. *Forbidden Planet* on Dawson St., Dublin, is the most expensive place on the planet to purchase *Cerebus* — But boy, is it worth it!

Well, if you look at it one way, there's a new adventure just around the next corner. If you look at it another way, you're always losing touch with the people you care about. I think that's one of the big drawbacks to the feminization of men: guys trying to make every relationship in their life a permanent one. It isn't possible, so why bust your own balls trying to do it? It never makes women happy, so why would it make *you* happy?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

(Can I call you Dave? It's so much less impersonal than "Mr. Sim". You can call me Sebastien, of course; every time I hear someone calling out "Mr. Fitch" I look around thinking that my father has just walked into the room.)

Having only started following *Cerebus* about seven months ago, I still have much to learn about the storyline, yourself and those very peculiar readers whose letters you are kind enough to print for everybody else's enjoyment.

I've just finished reading number 175 as well as *Church & State I* Perhaps one day I'll manage to get my hands on the second volume (not to mention all of the other "phone books"), but us unemployed university students keep having to buy pesky, useless things like food and subway tickets

Yet despite all of this, I think that I can safely say that your work (and Gerhard; am I the only one who gets the impression that Gerhard is sometimes ignored by fans?) is in the same category as the "comics" (that name sounds so derogatory) that are created in Europe, where the medium is surely at its height. (What do you think about it?)

In simpler words; Wow! Wonderful! Congratulations and, most of all, thank you!

Speaking of *Church & State*, I had a particularly interesting time reading it since I was then studying the relationship of *Church and State* during the English Reformation, as well as the exact same topic during the early Medieval Ages. But somehow I don't think that mentioning your work in one of my essays would be well seen by the prof! Oh well, I could always try . . . (What do you mean; "Cromwell wasn't an aardvark"?)

Before I go, I simply wanted to express how much I enjoyed Colin Upton's work in *Cerebus* 175. I myself often feel persecuted and belittled by over-zealous feminists (whatever the hell that means, anyhow) and political-correctness Inquisitors. In no way am I saying that women aren't justified in fighting against inequality; I simply feel that, as in all wars, many casualties seem to end up being amongst the innocent.

There are men out there who are not guilty of all that their gender is accused of, just like there are women out there that can be as cruel (emotionally rather than physically) as the "guilty". I'm simply tired of being made to feel guilty for things that I have never done nor have any intention of doing. I certainly admit that I'm not perfect. I've wanted to hit someone before. I even once felt an overwhelming urge to rape one person in particular. (Boy, saying that could get me in trouble!) But at the time I was under the sway of my emotions; in one foul stroke I'd just lost my girlfriend of seven months as well as one of my close friends and every cent that had been in my bank account. I don't think I need to draw you a picture of what had happened nor how betrayed, demolished and angry I felt.

It seems that our society always wants to categorize things and define problems with absolutes. "Women are the victims; Men are the perpetrators". In our quest for obvious definitions (perhaps in the hope that obvious problems would by definition have obvious solutions), we end up sacrificing the individual.

I'd like to one day walk up to a young women in a bar or after a class and say; "Hi, How are you? I'm not trying to hit on you, I'm not hoping to sleep with you and I'm not going to rape you. I would, however, like to have a conversation if you have the time. My name's Sebastien. What's yours?"

Sorry about my babbling. My very best wishes to you, Gerhard and Colin

Until #300, and forever after, take care

Sebastien A. Fitch
71 Charles St. East, #1504
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4Y 2T3

Never rule yourself out of getting laid: that's her job. 'Hey, you wanna go for a coffee?', or something along those lines. Just natural conversation. If she's interested, you could say 'shoelaces' and she'd think you were just the wittiest, cleverest thing she ever met. If she's not interested, there isn't a 'line' or an approach that would give you a snowball's chance in hell. I know your approach sounds 'safe', but that's exactly the problem with it. It's *too* 'safe'. At best you'll get to be her buddy (a member of her fan club) and have to sit back and watch while someone else moves in and gets her.

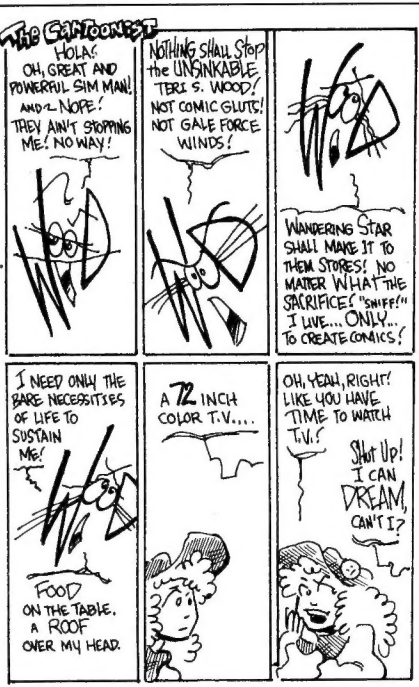
★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

I really enjoyed the Preview by Colin Upton in *Cerebus* 175. It has always been my hope that our society was working towards getting rid of classification, rather than punishing one category (able bodied white males) for the sins of the past. The story seems particularly relevant to Ontario, where the NDP was recently under fire for a job ad saying, "White males need not apply." The purpose of this letter is to clarify a point made by a character in the story about males being biologically irrelevant. I don't know if radical feminists really do use the example of creating embryos with two female eggs as an example of the uselessness of males, but if they do, they have missed the whole point of the results.

There have been attempts to produce offspring using genetic contributions from female gametes alone, but these all have failed in mammalian systems[1]. Briefly, the experimenters allow a sperm cell to fuse with an egg cell, thus stimulating the egg cell to start embryogenesis. They then remove the male pronucleus before it has a chance to join with the female pronucleus to form a true diploid cell. The cell is then fused with another egg to form a new cell containing two female pronuclei. Alternatively, they can inject a second female pronucleus following removal of the male pronucleus. The two pronuclei combine, and the embryo starts developing.

It was found that embryos formed in this manner were not viable. They failed to develop normal extra-embryonic components, and died. Complementary experiments,


THE CARTOONIST
HOLA!
OH, GREAT AND POWERFUL SIM MAN! AND? NOPE! THEY AIN'T STOPPING ME! NO WAY!
NOTHING SHALL STOP the UNSINKABLE TERI S. WOOD! NOT COMIC GLUTS! NOT GALE FORCE WINDS!
WANDERING STAR SHALL MAKE IT TO THEM STORES! NO MATTER WHAT THE SACRIFICE! "SNIFF!" I LIVE... ONLY... TO CREATE COMICS!
I NEED ONLY THE BARE NECESSITIES OF LIFE TO SUSTAIN ME!
FOOD ON THE TABLE. A ROOF OVER MY HEAD.
A 72 INCH COLOR T.V....
OH, YEAH, RIGHT! LIKE YOU HAVE TIME TO WATCH T.V.!
Shut Up! I CAN DREAM, CAN'T I?

postcard from Teri S. Wood, a self-publisher who is (gasp!) ON SCHEDULE!!* Wandering Star *5 is due early in 1994.

in which the female pronucleus was removed and a new male pronucleus injected, also failed to produce viable offspring. The opposite effect was seen in that there was excessive growth of extra-embryonic components compared to the embryo itself.

There have been numerous other experiments to further study inheritance from male and female lines, which I won't mention here. It seems however, that there is some mechanism of "imprinting" of particular genes. This means that certain genes inherited from the mother are chemically marked as such and are not expressed, and the same holds true for other genes inherited from the father. I should note that this seems to be true for only a small number of genes, and that Mendel's laws of inheritance (i.e., that parental origin does not matter) generally hold true. Also, this effect is different from sex-linked inheritance of genes located on the X or Y chromosome. Imprinting has been implicated in some human diseases, such as Huntington's disease.

The upshot of all this is that nature apparently has seen fit to keep us "honest" and that sexual reproduction involving two sexes is necessary (at least for the near future). I realize, of course, that it was only an off-hand remark made by a character in the story, but I thought it was important to point this out.

Sincerely,

Bill Rice
45 Homewood Ave.
Toronto, Ontario
M4Y 2K1

(Incidentally, I'm enjoying *Mothers and Daughters* as well, especially now that I've caught up with your story.)

Solter, D. (1988). Differential Imprinting and Expression of Maternal and Paternal Genomes. *Annu. Rev. Genet* 22: 127–146.

Hey. Just goes to show. You live long enough, you *will* learn everything.

★★★★★★★★★★

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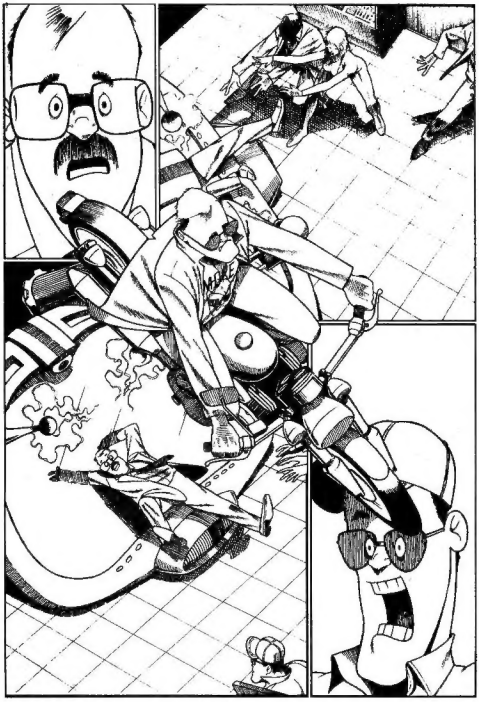

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"Once I'm financially secure, I can write exactly what I want to write about without having to worry if it sells or not"
Victor Reid

Roxanne Starr's Hallowe'en costume 1993 • costume by Fiona Leonard • costume paint and photo Joe Phillips